Trans-Lake Washington Project
Washington State Department of Transportation
Sound Transit

Purpose of and Need for the Action Trans-Lake Washington EIS

Adopted by Executive and Technical Steering Committees – June 14, 2000

Project Status

In 1997, the State Transportation Commission authorized the Trans-Lake Washington Study to identify a set of "reasonable and feasible solutions" to improve mobility across and around Lake Washington. In July of 1999, 44 of the 47 members of the Trans-Lake Study Committee, composed of representatives from public agencies, neighborhoods, businesses, and advocacy groups, recommended a number of potential solutions for increasing trans-lake mobility in several cross-lake corridors. The recommendations for the SR 522 are being reviewed in other studies, as are some of the recommendations for the I-90 corridor. The Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration, along with the Washington Department of Transportation and Sound Transit, are proposing to prepare a NEPA/SEPA EIS to address the needs in the SR 520 corridor as identified by the Trans-Lake Washington Study Committee and discussed below.

Purpose of the Proposed Action

The purpose of the proposed action is to improve mobility for people and goods across Lake Washington within the SR 520 corridor from Seattle to Redmond in a manner that is safe, reliable, and cost-effective, while avoiding, minimizing and/or mitigating impacts on affected neighborhoods and the environment.

Need for the Proposed Action

Adapted from the Trans-Lake Washington Study Committee Problem Statement, November 5, 1998

Land Uses And Transportation Systems Are Not Integrated In Their Planning And Implementation

The evolution of our transportation system has not kept pace with rapid job and residential growth. Neither transit development, demand management programs, roadway capacity additions, nor financing systems have been sufficient to keep pace with the trips generated by this growing population. Adopted local and regional growth management and transportation plans and policies are tending to concentrate and integrate residential employment patterns more than in the past, partly in an effort to ease burdens on the transportation system. However, substantial infrastructure investments, transit service, and demand management policies also called for by those plans have only been partially implemented. Infill has placed greater burdens on the existing system. Given this context,

congestion levels in the Trans-Lake Study area are projected to get worse in the next ten to twenty years.

The Transportation System Suffers From Extensive Congestion

Vehicle miles traveled have been growing as fast or faster than the population. During much of the day, and especially at peak commute periods, highway lanes across and around the north end of Lake Washington and routes feeding those trans-lake facilities are heavily congested. When congestion occurs on trans-lake routes, it backs up onto major north-south corridors and adjacent arterials, congesting those routes as well. Those users dependent on these routes for safe, regional, travel and the movement of freight and goods, experience travel delays, lack of predictability, and a corresponding loss of economic productivity and overall quality of life.

Reliability And Safety Of The System Are Impaired

The state highway, arterial, and local street systems around and adjacent to the lake are vulnerable to incident-caused back-ups. Minor incidents generate substantial delays throughout the entire system; major incidents cause near gridlock conditions as vehicles avoid a blocked route only to crowd others. Conflict between regional and local traffic, lack of adequate alternative modes, linkages to the rest of the system, weave patterns near interchanges, and substandard HOV lanes and / or the lack of shoulders also contribute to this unreliability and to a reduction in safety. A longer-term issue affecting system reliability and safety is the structural condition of the pontoon section of the Evergreen Point Floating Bridge. Where HOV lanes, metering or preferential treatment are not present, transit and carpool users are delayed by traffic congestion in general purpose lanes, reducing the effectiveness of existing transit and ridesharing services. For those desiring pedestrian or bicycle travel, the system is incomplete, making those options either impossible or unsafe.

Neighborhoods, Business Centers, And The Environment Are Impacted

The livability of neighborhoods, and the access to local arterials and smaller residential streets in the vicinity of cross-lake routes, are negatively impacted by high traffic volumes. A lack of adequate mitigation results in “cut-through” traffic, noise, vibration, air pollution, dust and restricted access for local residents and local businesses. Walking and bicycling are made less safe and enjoyable. Considerable land is consumed and some neighborhoods are effectively divided. Vehicle emissions negatively impact air and water quality throughout the region.